



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russia's Unusual Military Activity Along the Ukrainian Border

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer to a Special Joint Session of the
Forum for Security Cooperation and the Permanent Council
Vienna, April 17, 2014

Thank you.

OSCE participating States signed up to the Vienna Document mechanisms as a way of ensuring the security in Europe by enhancing confidence and transparency. We believe that conventional arms control has a valuable role: it helps build confidence by dispelling concerns about military activities and encourages transparency among participating States. Indeed, by making full use of its rights to inspect other participating States, Russia has demonstrated that it still finds value in these instruments, and as others have noted, Russia Deputy Defense Minister Antonov recently reconfirmed Russia's intention to continue implementing Vienna Document obligations, among others.

We are deeply concerned about Russia's refusal to provide further information about its unusual military activities near its border with Ukraine. Russia's decision not to attend today's joint FSC-PC meeting, as well as the FSC-PC meeting on April 7, is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Vienna Document.

We encourage Russia to comply with the commitments it signed up to in the Vienna Document 2011, in letter and spirit. Not doing so will undermine the principles and commitments that have underpinned Euro-Atlantic security for years. Paragraph 16 of the Vienna Document clearly establishes that participating States with concerns about any unusual and unscheduled military activities can request meetings with the responding State and with the full FSC-PC to discuss their concerns and assess the situation – and there is no provision for the requested State to refuse to attend such meetings.

We are also concerned by the language being used by the Russian Federation to describe ongoing attempts by participating States to gain information regarding Russian military activity. The Canadian-Estonian request was neither "immoral" nor "groundless" as Russia claimed.

Mere geographic proximity cannot be the litmus test for validating other participating States' security concerns. As an institution that purports to undergird "security from Vancouver to Vladivostok," the OSCE is a bulwark for collective security. Apposite of today's meeting, security for Ukraine is also security for Canada, security for Estonia, security for the United States, and security for all of us.

In late March, the United States invoked Vienna Document provisions to ask Russia for information about military activities taking place east of the Ukrainian border. It is not unreasonable for us to have deep concerns about troops massed on Ukraine's border, especially given the recent and ongoing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the Crimea region of Ukraine. Russia has committed grievous violations of international law, and this is the background against which we are seeking to understand their deployment of troops on the Ukrainian border.

We see nothing routine about Russia's ongoing military activities near its border with Ukraine. The composition, positioning, and continuing extended deployment in the field of these forces continue to make clear that this is not a routine and previously scheduled military exercise. We urge Russia to immediately reduce its troop strength to pre-crisis numbers and positions and return troops to their peacetime locations.

Reports also suggest that the number of forces involved in these military activities exceed the thresholds for notification and observation under the Vienna Document.

Russia has publicly said it has battalions deployed near the border with Ukraine. If Russia had participated at the joint FSC-PC meetings today or on April 7, it would have heard the concerns, supported by evidence, of participating States. This would have provided an excellent opportunity for Russia to constructively respond.

We urge Russia to offer to accept additional Vienna Document inspections to enable its OSCE partners to observe Russian military activity in the region of the Ukrainian border.

It is important that the OSCE States implement not only the letter, but also the spirit of the Vienna Document, in order to build confidence. Recent events have highlighted areas in the document that need to be improved, such as ensuring that inspection quotas are available in crisis situations and that notifications are provided for a broader range of activities. These could be addressed as part of the effort to update the Vienna Document.

It is important that we take advantage of all the confidence-building tools at our disposal as we seek to resolve this crisis diplomatically, and recent activities have shown that our conventional arms control instruments can help by providing insight into military activities. The Vienna Document, like the Open Skies Treaty, was not meant to be a fair-weather instrument. Provisions like the Chapter III Risk Reduction mechanisms were designed for use when there were tensions, conflicts, concerns. If they are not to be used now, when would they be used? Russia's failure to comply with its Vienna Document obligations is certainly regrettable, but it does not suggest that our instruments are inherently flawed, or irreparably damaged, by the events in Crimea or elsewhere in Ukraine.

Finally, we note with high concern reports of Russian-supported military activity in Eastern Ukraine. Actions to promote instability on the territory of another OSCE participating State are wholly inconsistent with the basic tenets of cooperative relations among States. The risk is real that these fomented tensions could lead to further violence and loss of life. I would note that, as we've been meeting here this morning, President Putin has been conducting one of his call-in shows, and he admitted that Russian military forces were present in Crimea, not on their bases, in advance of the so-called "referendum." The "little green men," he admitted, were Russian forces. So if the little green men were Russian forces in Crimea, it stands to

reason that we have reasonable concerns – as well as a preponderance of evidence – that the Russian Federation is unconstructively engaged in Eastern Ukraine as well.

The United States underscores that the right next step is de-escalation. Russia should step back, politically and militarily, and allow Ukraine to proceed with the important internal constitutional processes that will enable its own people to choose their future.

We share the assessment raised by others that, given Russia's repeated violations, it is time to consider what additional steps might be taken to underscore the unacceptability of their acts, and to reinforce our shared commitment to the principles that underlie our work.

Thank you.